

Bedford Conservation Areas - Values, Protection and Management

Over 800 acres of Town-owned open space lands are held as conservation areas for the preservation of natural resources, and are controlled and managed by the Bedford Conservation Commission. Most of these areas were conveyed to the Town under Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 40, section 8C - The Conservation Commission Act. Lands conveyed under this statute are protected in perpetuity from development and other changes that would detract from their functions and values. Maintenance of these areas in a natural state contributes to the protection of water resources, plant communities, scenic vistas, unique wildlife habitat and floodplain functions, and provides trail connections, neighborhood open space, and buffers between incompatible land uses. All Bedford conservation areas are open to the general public for hiking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, nature study and picnics. Overnight camping for organized youth and scout groups is allowed at Hartwell Town Forest at the discretion of the Commission. The conservation areas and trails are maintained by the Commission, the Trails Committee and the Bedford Conservation Land Stewards. Maps of Bedford's conservation areas and trails are available through the Interactive Trail Map link, and from the Conservation Office at Town Hall.

The following sections include descriptions of the conservation areas, as well as historical information and management objectives. Each section groups neighboring conservation areas in geographic locations within the Town. Many of these areas adjoin conservation restrictions and municipal lands that provide additional passive recreational opportunities and trail connections.

West Bedford: North Road to Davis Road

The lands west of North Road between the Billerica boundary and Davis Road are within the watershed to the Concord River, draining via Mill Brook and Peppergrass Brook. Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge and the Huckins Farm Conservation Restriction dominate the protected landscape, which includes numerous contiguous conservation areas. Conservation Areas: Minnie Reid, Coffin, Altmann, Lillian Carlson, Anthony, Carlisle Road, Letizi, Langone, Pine Grove Farm, Minnie Reid. Located at the intersection of North and Chelmsford Roads, this 21-acre parcel was purchased in 1986; it contains a variety of habitats, including open field, white pine forest, mixed hardwoods and wetlands. A distinguishing feature is its position as the starting point for a long trail system extending through the Huckins Farm Conservation Restriction to Carlisle and Davis Roads. The main blue trail passes by vernal pool habitat, and leads to a tributary of Mill Brook at the property boundary with Huckins Farm. There is a small parking lot and kiosk at the entrance. Management objectives center around annual mowing of the upper and lower fields and maintenance of the trails.

Carlisle Road Conservation Areas. Over a period of 20 years, nine separate parcels of land have been acquired in this area, resulting in 75 acres of land protected for natural resources. The 1991 Redmond-Anderson gift included access from Old Causeway Road; this beautiful area is mostly a white pine grove, with American beech saplings and a variety of understory shrubs. At all times of the year it appears to serve as active habitat for white-tailed deer. At the southerly boundary of this land, the Brown and Page parcels consist of long narrow strips of land, a reminder of the colonial practice of dividing cedar swamp and river meadows. The Carlson conservation area was acquired in 1993, and connected this growing protected corridor to Carlisle Road. The land contains areas of red maple swamp and open marsh. Sweet pepperbush, highbush blueberry and swamp azalea form a dense understory. Cinnamon ferns in this wetland can grow to five feet. An ideal bird-watching location, the area has been made more accessible by the installation of bog bridges. In 1995 the Town acquired the Comley and Brennan parcels, gaining both streamside habitat by Peppergrass Brook and upland pine, oak and yellow birch forest by Harvard Road. The 1995 Letzipurchase, while not contiguous with the other areas, adds an area with frontage off Carlisle Road and common boundaries with Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge. In 2002 the Peppergrass Brook conservation area was acquired with State funding and in cooperation with Sudbury Valley Trustees. This important area includes valuable upland and wetland habitats directly adjacent to Peppergrass Brook. In the same year, the Wellington conservation area was donated to the Town, providing access to Harvard Drive.

Langone and Pine Grove Farm. Directly across Carlisle Road from the Carlson conservation area, the Langone conservation area and Bedford Meadows conservation restriction continue the protected corridor and the public access trails. In 2002 the five parcels of the Pine Grove Farm conservation area were donated to the Town in memory of the Lewellen family. This gift completed a long-planned system of continuous trails, conservation areas and restrictions, and wildlife habitat corridors. This system comprises approximately 350 acres of protected land and 5 miles of trails between North and Davis Roads, a significant extension to the adjacent 692 acres at Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge. A primary management objective in these areas is to improve public access and publicize the long trail system.

South/Southwest Bedford: Davis Road, Upper Concord/Great Road, to South Road
Between Davis Road and South Road by the Minuteman Bikeway, west to the Concord River and south to the boundaries with Concord and Lexington lie a wide variety of open space landscapes within both the Concord and Shawsheen River watersheds. Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge is the largest protected area to the west; south of the East-West Railroad Bed approximately 250 acres of conservation land provide a buffer to L.G. Hanscom Field.

Conservation Areas: White Cedar Swamp, Pine Grove Farm, Mongo Brook, Louise K. Brown, Papkee, Clark, Little Meadow, Dellovo, Mary Putnam Webber Wildlife Preserve, Vanderhoof,

Elm Brook, Engelhardt, Hartwell Town Forest, Hartwell Brook, George Jordan.

White Cedar Swamp. The 24.1-acre White Cedar Swamp conservation area consists of two parcels on either side of Davis Road, purchased in 1978 with State Self-Help funding. The northwestern parcel is distinguished by a stand of Atlantic White Cedar, remnants of a cedar swamp which once extended over a large area during colonial times and was called the "Sancta Domingo Swamp", or "Sacred Dominion". Several white cedar stands remain in the wetlands between Davis and Dudley Roads. The swamp is most accessible when the ground is frozen, or during dry summers. Construction of a short boardwalk would make the area accessible for educational purposes.

Louise K. Brown. This 7.9-acre gift to the Town was acquired in 1978. It is located between Davis and Concord Roads, adjacent to one of the two White Cedar Swamp parcels. Mongo Brook flows through this land from the watershed divide of the Concord River east to Elm Brook and the Shawsheen River, despite its proximity to the Concord River floodplain. The southerly cedar swamp parcel extends to Concord Road; all areas between Davis and Concord Roads area both areas are generally too wet to be easily accessed.

Clark and Little Meadow. The Clark (14.4 acres) and Little Meadow (5.92 acres) conservation areas were major conservation purchases by the Town in 1986 and 1988. Little Meadow and Clark provide important conservation functions for open space, scenic values, agricultural heritage, passive recreation, and wildlife habitat, representing one of the few areas in town where Bedford's agricultural heritage and its associated scenic values are preserved. Situated on either side of Davis Road, each is maintained as an active hayfield by annual mowing in late summer to preserve their historical value as open agricultural fields and wildlife habitat. Perimeter trails are also kept open by walkers and horseback riders. Large fields are an unusual wildlife habitat type in the Bedford area. Little Meadow and Clark have cumulative wildlife habitat values because Little Meadow abuts the Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge and both lie adjacent to wet meadow, red maple swamp, or floodplain forest. Both fields are used as nesting or migration sites for bobolink, and several avian studies have taken place in the fields. Great Meadows harbors populations of state-listed turtles, which seek out suitable nesting and foraging habitats in these fields and wetlands. Management of the fields consists of annual mowing in late summer to preserve the nesting areas.

Mary Putnam Webber Wildlife Preserve. This 20-acre parcel was given to the Town in 1990 for the purpose of protecting uplands and sensitive wetlands from proposed development as a state landfill. Although the MWRA landfill was not constructed, the Town recognized the importance of this area to the conservation of natural resources and neighborhood character. The land contains both mature oak forest and white pine groves, surrounding a certified vernal pool containing wood frog habitat. Located adjacent to the railroad bed, the land is accessible

from either Concord or Hartwell Road. Management goals include control of brush dumping and off-road vehicles.

Vanderhoof. In association with the Webber gift, the Town purchased this adjoining 8-acre parcel in 1990 in order to extend the protected area. Consisting primarily of red maple swamp, the Vanderhoof land abuts Webber and extends to the Massport property at Hanscom Field. A trail extends from Webber through Vanderhoof to this boundary. Excellent potential exists for a regional trail leading from the railroad bed along the cart path, through the Massport land to Concord, and possibly to Minuteman National Historic Park. Both the path and sensitive surrounding wetlands need to be protected from damage by off-road vehicles.

Dellovo. The acquisition of Webber and Vanderhoof was followed by the purchase of the Dellovo parcel in 1991. The purchase added 15 acres to the protective buffer now established between Hanscom Field and the south Bedford neighborhoods. The Dellovo land is located just east of Concord Road on the east-west railroad bed. A short trail leads from the railroad bed through a poplar grove and red maple swamp to the edge of an open, grassy meadow. Once ditched and maintained in horticulture, the wetlands on the site have since reverted to wet meadow and shrub swamp. Native sedges and wetland grasses intermingle with wetland shrubs, silver maple, wild rose and ferns. This part of Bedford is distinguished by a wide variety of native plant species, documented by a botanical list developed by the conservation area's Land Steward. Worthwhile management activities would include control of shrubs and saplings in order to maintain wet meadow habitat.

Elm Brook. The Elm Brook Conservation Area consists of 19.3 acres located between South Road, Washington Street, and Railroad Avenue. The purchase of this area in 1978 included State Self-Help funding. Virtually all of the site is within wetlands or floodplain, and is primarily vegetated with red maple. Trails have been established along Elm Brook and to the east-west railroad bed. As one of the conservation areas lying closest to the center of Town, the woodlands and trails provide passive recreational opportunities and vegetated buffers for several neighborhoods. Parking is available at the end of Railroad Avenue just south of the Jr. High School athletic fields. Trail development and maintenance include preservation of vegetation along the bank of the brook. Management objectives include dispersal of brush piles and sign improvement.

Engelhardt. Located almost across the road from the Elm Brook Conservation Area, this 2.24-acre parcel was acquired as a gift in 1993 in the course of residential lot development on Otis Street and Highland Avenue. The parcel includes some shrub and sapling areas, a small pond, and a large wet meadow. Access is on Otis Street, a short walk from the Railroad Avenue parking area. Future improvements include development of a trail to the pond, and a management schedule for the control of shrubs in order to keep the meadow open.

Hartwell Town Forest. Bedford's largest conservation area, located between the Hartwell Road residential neighborhood and Hanscom Field, constituted the first town land to be dedicated to the conservation of natural resources (forest and aquifer protection). The 1940 gift of 118 acres was intended as a living memorial to the Hartwell family which had owned the tract continuously from the 1666 colonial grant to William Hartwell. Hartwell Town Forest is managed under the provisions of the Massachusetts Town Forest Act as a "public domain" which must be devoted to the culture of forest trees or to the preservation of the municipality's water supply, although erection of a building for public instruction and recreation may be considered. The 1977 Annual Town Meeting transferred management from the former Town Forest Committee to the Conservation Commission. Its initial use as a managed town forest has evolved to habitat preservation and passive recreation. Its many valuable features include its function as a noise and visual buffer between Hanscom Field and densely settled residential areas, the large forested wetland bordering Hartwell Brook, the mature white pines with their great horned owl nesting areas, and excellent level hiking and cross-country ski trails. As a relatively large, contiguous tract of mature forest, Hartwell may be of particular value for neotropical migrant birds, such as the rose-breasted grosbeak, ovenbird, eastern wood-pewee, and scarlet tanager, which have been observed there during breeding season. These species require large, unbroken tracts of forest to successfully breed. The forest includes two camping and picnic areas, which are used by Scout troops for overnight camping. An extensive trail system extends from Hartwell and South Roads to the Jordan Conservation Area and the Air Force family campground at Hanscom Field. Limited roadside parking is available at the Hartwell Road entrance. Recommended improvements include improved bridges or boardwalks across wetland areas, cross-country ski trail grooming, forestry management, and a nature interpretive trail. In 2005 the 21-acre Hartwell Brook conservation area was acquired as part of a residential development.

George Jordan. Located adjacent to Hartwell Town Forest and Massport land off Hartwell Road, the 37.3-acre George Jordan Conservation Area adds considerably to the Town Forest's value as an extension of the buffer to the Hanscom area, as an access point, and as the location of a small parking area. The land was purchased in 1972, with state and federal assistance, to provide a variety of outdoor recreational and agricultural uses and a buffer from Hanscom Field, and to preserve the flood control function of the Hartwell Brook watershed which drains into the Elm Brook. The area's most visible and appreciated use is its role as a community garden site. (Contact the Conservation Office if you would like to learn more about how to sign up for a garden plot.) The community garden program is presently limited to the smaller of two fields; the larger field is no longer used as a garden and has become overgrown. The interior portion of the land consists of wooded swamp, with several abandoned cranberry bogs providing additional

habitat diversity. A trail extends from the gardening area to the Hartwell Forest trail system. Recent management has focused on maintenance of the fields, installation of a water supply for gardeners, and gradual removal of interior fencing. Continuing objectives include establishment of composting areas, control of encroaching shrubs, entrance landscaping and signage, and improvement of the trail system including the area of the cranberry bogs.

North Central Bedford: North Road, Great Road, Route 62 to Old Billerica Road

From Great Road north to the Billerica boundary, the Town is bisected by the Town-owned North-South Railroad Bed, used as a walking and bike path. Along this corridor the Town has acquired some of its most valued protected lands, including ponds, ledges and diverse upland landscapes. Springs Brook is the major stream in this area; however, the watershed divide between the Concord River and Shawsheen River bisects this area.

Conservation Areas: Buehler Ponds, Lane Farm, Governor Winthrop, Hayden Highlands, Fawn Lake, Sheldon, Wilderness Park, Cappadona, Doyle, York, Anthony, Springs Brook, Page School Outdoor Classroom

Buehler Ponds. The Buehler Ponds Conservation Area includes a a 6.4-acre parcel purchased in 1978 with State Self-Help funding and an adjoining 3-acre parcel acquired as a gift in 1987. The .96-acre Lane Farm Conservation Area was donated in 2008, and includes a portion of the upper pond shore and trail. Located adjacent to the north-south railroad bed, these sites contains upland forest, two man-made ponds, gneiss bedrock outcrops marked by glacial scupting, and trails leading around the ponds and south to Job Lane School. Recommended improvements include control of emergent plant growth in the south pond and management of encroaching non-native vegetation below the outcrop. Parking is available at Job Lane School and on the railroad bed at Fawn Lake.

Governor Winthrop and Hayden Highlands. Two conservation areas comprising 18.35 acres were conveyed to the Town in 1995 as part of a residential subdivision design. The two parcels lie adjacent to each other and provide connections from Springs Road, Donovan Drive and Copeland Drive to the north-south railroad bed between Buehler Ponds and Fawn Lake. The two areas are additionally protected by conservation restrictions. The Governor Winthrop parcel is characterized by upland and wetland forested areas; the Hayden Highlands parcel includes a central shrub swamp and a vernal pool providing habitat for wood frogs. Parking is available at Job Lane School or Fawn Lake. Management objectives include the expansion of the Governor Winthrop trail to Hayden Highlands and to Springs Road for a connection to the trails at Middlesex Community College.

Fawn Lake. The most visible and valuable conservation area in Bedford owes its popularity to the park-like setting with trails around a 12-acre pond, 2-acre lawn and 25-acre forest, purchased in 1979 with State Self-Help funding. The gift of the 3.5-acre Sheldon Conservation Area in 1992 established a valuable 2.3-acre buffer between Fawn Lake and nearby residential areas. A shrub swamp on the property provides habitat quite different from the Fawn Lake area, and preservation of woodland and swamp on the side of the railroad bed opposite Fawn Lake is extremely important to preservation of the pond's visual attraction.

Fawn Lake's interesting past as a mineral springs health resort and early pharmaceutical center reminds the visitor that the lake has been a scenic and restorative attraction for over a century. Traces of the old mineral springs remain, but present use is more likely to be fishing, boating or strolling around the shore. Native vegetation predominates, and the shore is one of the best places in Bedford to see mountain laurel. Also scattered throughout the site are grand examples of former landscaping, such as Japanese maple, magnolia, wisteria and rhododendron. Parking is available on Sweetwater Avenue or the railroad bed.

The Commission's greatest conservation management challenge is the control of invasive aquatic vegetation, which is causing the gradual eutrophication of the pond. This has been the subject of extensive study, resulting in a lengthy program of hydroraking and herbicide treatment. Long-term management goals include additional hydroraking and control of damage to paths and vegetation from beaver activity.

Wilderness Park and Cappadona. This large woodland and wetland area has proved to be a significant haven for a wide variety of wildlife. Its location north of the VA Hospital grounds and within the Springs Brook corridor results in a rich combination of diverse habitats and edge areas. Wilderness Park includes two parcels conveyed to the town between 1959 and 1983 from the federal government as surplus property, together comprising over 73 acres. Deed restrictions limit uses to those related to conservation and recreation. The 1983 Annual Town Meeting transferred management of the park to the Commission. This large tract supports a varied wildlife population, including pileated woodpecker, barred owl and fisher. Parking is available at the VA Hospital/Middlesex Community College parking lot south of Fawn Lake.

The trail system at Wilderness Park is well-maintained, and has been enhanced by two recent bridge and bog bridge projects. Current improvements include the construction of additional trails to connect existing pathways. The Cappadona Conservation Area is a 12.5-acre property situated adjacent to Wilderness Park along Springs Brook. Acquired in 1993 as a gift in association with a small residential subdivision, the parcel is particularly important as wetland turtle habitat. A wetland trail from Wilderness Park would allow viewing of Springs Brook and its

bordering marshes.

Springs Brook. The Springs Brook Conservation Area, acquired in 1966, is a 20.5-acre property south of Wilderness Park and Cappadona. Located next to the Springs Brook Park recreation area, it provides additional passive recreational opportunities as well as a buffer to Springs Brook. The extensive Springs Brook corridor includes Wilderness Park, Cappadona, the VA Hospital open grounds, the Springs Brook properties, the Carleton-Willard Conservation Restriction, and Page School Outdoor Classroom at Old Billerica Road. Public access to the Springs Brook Conservation Area is available at Springs Brook Park and from the end of Francis Kelley Road. Future efforts should include reconstruction of the boardwalk and bridge across Springs Brook to Carleton-Willard, and coordination with Carleton-Willard management for use of the trails to Old Billerica Road.

Murray York. This property was purchased by the Town in 1963 as surplus land from the federal government; partial reimbursement was acquired as Bedford's first State Self-Help Project. The land was conveyed for conservation use, and for some years the Town was required to report to the U.S. Department of the Interior on its status and maintenance. The land contains mature forest and both wooded and open wetland areas. York is accessible from the north-south railroad bed. New trails have been developed and bog bridges have been installed over the wetter areas.

Page School Outdoor Classroom. When the Town sold the Page School site, this small area was retained as a 1.4-acre nature study area. Springs Brook flows alongside the property just before passing under Old Billerica Road. Numerous species of marsh and aquatic vegetation occur in this small area, including a dense cat-tail marsh. Easy access from Old Billerica Road provides the potential for increased use. A small viewing and sitting area might encourage walkers to stop and explore, and a sign would help to identify intended use.

Doyle. This 4-acre conservation area was purchased in 2006. Located between Old Billerica Road and Sweeney Ridge Road, the area contains old field, red maple swamp and shrub swamp/bog areas supporting a number of amphibians. No trails have been established, although access is available over an easement from Sweeney Ridge Road.

Anthony. Three parcels of land were acquired as a 6.1-acre combined purchase and gift in 2009. The largest of the three is located off Old Middlesex Road, and contains part of the headwaters to Peppergrass Brook.

East Bedford: Old Billerica Road, Burlington Road, Great Road, to South Road

The conservation areas in this section are in general west of Route 3 and north of the

Shawsheen River. They include significant upland acreage, priority habitats associated with the Shawsheen River, vernal pools and riverine habitats. To the south, several conservation areas near the Lexington boundary add to neighborhood buffers and greenspace near rivers and streams.

Conservation Areas: O'Connor, Shawsheen River, Wilson Mill Park, Reeves Road, Page/Corey, Frost, Poock, Anthony, Moore

O'Connor.

Shawsheen River. The Shawsheen River Conservation Areas together consist of 28.3 continuous acres forming a protected greenway along the north side of the Shawsheen River corridor between Middlesex Turnpike and Route 3. In this location the river winds in a natural channel between extensive open marsh and shrub swamp to either side. The acquisitions took place between 1975 and 1993 through gifts and purchase. The river is accessible to small boats, and is navigable at high water throughout its course through Bedford. The conservation areas are also partially accessible via a trail established over an upland conservation restriction. Additional restrictions on the riverfront area by Crosbys Hill have laid the foundation for a greenway corridor along both sides of the river. Management improvements should include completion of a trail to the Route 3 bridge, and establishment of a small parking area and boat launch site. (See article)

Reeves Road. A 2-acre conservation purchase and restriction off Reeves Road in 1986 creates a buffer between Burlington and the Reeves Road area neighborhoods.

Page/Corey.

Frost. This 5-acre area was donated to the Town between 1982 and 1995 by several members of the Frost family. Located on Great Road at the entrance to Bedford from Lexington, it comprises the only undeveloped protected land on Great Road outside the historic district. Its visual effect beautifies this area and adds value to neighboring residences.

Poock. The Town acquired this 3.68-acre property as a gift in 1981. Its location near Elm Brook at Wiggins Avenue provides important protection for the brook and a buffer to the center of town and nearby commercial development. Management efforts have recently included an approach to a nearby landowner for improvement of storm drainage.

Moore.

